

In 1974, Random House published a book called *The Inner Game of Tennis* by Timothy Gallwey.

This book went on to influence dozens of coaches who gifted this book to players. Al Gore gave this book to his staff; Itzhak Perlman recommended it to aspiring violinists; Billy Jean King and Jimmy Carter were BIG fans too.

In 2006, Lawrence Jackson, a defensive end for the USC football team, was known as Lo Jack for the way he was able to sack the quarterback.

However, in his junior year, he earned the name No Sack and lost his edge. His coach, Pete Carroll, handed him a copy of the book. Jackson read it, absorbed it, and went on to earn back his previous Lo Jack title. In 2008, he won a place on the Seattle Seahawks team in the first round of the NFL draft.

Now you all know I'm not a big, raging football fan - but I am a huge, curious fan of anything that helps us understand (and implement) self-mastery, especially when it comes to managing one's brain.

The outer game is what we all focus on - it's why with a diet book, we skip every chapter EXCEPT the one with the plan!

Tennis players hire coaches to work on their form. So do golfers, swimmers, and gymnasts.

They are all looking for a competitive edge, and at this level of mastery of their sport, they have all shown great talent and capacity to excel.

Where it goes wrong and these pros go from being a Lo Jack to a No Sack is the INNER GAME.

The reason this is so is the same reason we sit on the couch and dig into a bowl of ice cream even though we are trying to lose weight.

A lot can go wrong in the chain of command connecting the brain and the body.

Gallwey calls the body Self 2, while the brain is Self 1.

Self 1 instructs Self 2 to act.

The problem is Self 1 tries to sell Self 2 on doing something she already knows "how" to do, and that leads to overthinking and, for a lot of folks, procrastination.

When a cat is trying to catch a bird, the only thing the cat sees is the bird. When the bird tries to leave, the cat leaps at the same time, catches it in the air, and eats it. That's what predators do.

The cat's leap in the air was flawless... an award-winning catch and grab!

There was no victory dance in the end zone, no other birds flying in to congratulate her, nothing - her reward was the bird.

Mel Robbins became famous for her 5-second rule for beating procrastination. A simple countdown...5,4,3,2,1 and off you go to do the thing or get out of bed or whatever else needs to get done.

The Inner Game utilizes counting as well. Also, not being bored, believe it or not, is part of this book's success.

When the outer stuff isn't happening, it's because the inner stuff is out of whack.

The outer stuff is easy, simple, and straightforward - think about it. If I asked you for advice on losing weight, decluttering a house, training for a marathon, or meal planning, every single one of you could tell me exactly how to start, what you need as far as time, equipment, materials, tools, how much it would cost, and even who to go to.

And for the most part, the advice would be solid.

But actually DOING it requires an inner game that calls for another level of discipline - orderly and all encompassing, because it's not just "the thing," it's all the things - heart, mind, body, and soul.

Michael Matthews says it's as easy as shaving your legs with an axe.

I liken it to the slippery slope of excuses and rationalizations -

- It's no biggie, I'll start tomorrow...
- Well *BURP* it was a special occasion and so was last Saturday night, but oh well...
- I'm not going to beat myself up...

Once momentum is lost, it's tough to get back into the swing of things.

Grit not Quit has to be the theme song for mastering the inner game. Here are some things to help you:

1. Stop trying and start scheduling--this is where the counting part comes in for the inner game. PLAN to make it happen, dedicate the time, and stick to it.

2. Let go of self-judgments and just let it happen--keeping your brain focused on what needs doing, rather than the emotional expenditure of judgment, will keep you going.

3. Have a relaxed concentration - get centered. In other words: MEDITATE!

4. Trust yourself to do it imperfectly. (Yes, you read that correctly!) Imperfect is the path to excellence, and THAT is the goal after all.

5. Learn from the past, visualize the vibrant future you desire, and hold the vision loosely in the palm of your hand--it may look slightly different than what you visualized, but who cares? You're not looking for an exact vision, you're looking for the idea of it. My house isn't the same one on my Vibrant Vision Board, but it's on the water, with a dock and a boat!